

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Grand Coulee Substation Geotechnical Investigations

Project No.: P05734, P02557, P02514, P03252

Project Manager: Erin Couch, NWMM-1; Mike Henjum, TIPS-CSB-2; Jay Chester, TIPS-TPP-1

Location: Douglas and Grant counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to conduct geotechnical investigations to support the design for several BPA facilities projects such as new maintenance headquarters (MHQ), 230-kilovolt (kV) switchyard parking area, and sewer upgrades and BPA transmission projects such as 115-kV, 230-kV, and 500-kV switchyard electrical upgrades and modernization. Geotechnical investigations at Grand Coulee Substation are necessary for future projects to characterize subsurface conditions and provide information for proper architectural and electrical design, safe construction, and long-term site reliability.

To support facilities project planning, geotechnical testing would include four borings, five 2-foot-wide by 6-foot-deep test pits, five 5-foot by 5-foot infiltration tests at the proposed MHQ site, located southwest of the 500-kV switchyard. Along Short Road, leading up to the proposed MHQ site, 10 borings would be conducted at approximately 815-foot intervals. At the 230-kV switchyard, 1 5-foot by 5-foot infiltration test pit would occur on the western side of the parking lot, one 2-foot-wide by 6-foot-deep test pit would occur on the eastern side of the parking lot, and five borings would be in the surface of the parking lot.

To support transmission projects, geotechnical testing would include fifteen borings at the 230-kV switchyard as well as one boring at the 500-kV switchyard. Minor grading and vegetation clearing would be required along an approximately 600-foot-long travel path to access three boring locations located northeast of the 230-kV switchyard and along two approximately 100-foot-long travel paths to access two separate boring locations located southeast of the 230-kV switchyard. Geotechnical testing would also include resistivity testing along six linear testing paths located adjacent to the 115-kV, 230 kV, and 500-kV switchyards. Resistivity testing would consist of placing metal rods (approximately 0.25-inch diameter) into the ground at alternating horizontal distances along the linear paths to depths of 2-inch to 12-inch. A temporary electrical current generated using a 12-volt battery would then be applied to measure the soil's resistance to electrical current.

The borings would be 4 inches in diameter, extend from 10 feet to 80 feet in depth, or until refusal, and would utilize a track-mounted hollow-stem auger. Test pits would utilize a rubber-tired backhoe. Excavated soil would be temporarily stored beside the testing areas. After completion, the boring and test pit locations would be immediately backfilled, and the area would be graded to original contours.

The Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act directs BPA to construct, acquire, operate, maintain, repair, relocate, and replace the transmission system, including facilities and structures appurtenant thereto. (16 United States Code [U.S.C] § 838i(b)). The BPA Administrator is further charged with maintaining electrical stability and reliability, selling transmission and interconnection services, and providing service to BPA's customers. (16 U.S.C § 838b(b-d)). The Administrator is also authorized to conduct electrical research, development, experimentation, tests, and investigation related to construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission systems and facilities. (16 U.S.C § 838i(b)(3)).

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.102 of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, Jul. 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996; 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025, Interim Final Rule) and the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures*, BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

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Environmental Protection Specialist

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Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

Proposed Action: Grand Coulee Substation Geotechnical Investigations

Project Site Description

The proposed project is in central Washington along the Columbia Plateau at approximately 1,700 to 2,400 feet above sea level. The project area occurs at and adjacent to the existing Grand Coulee Substation 115-kV, 230-kV, and 500-kV switchyards. The general area surrounding the switchyards consists of an existing electrical transmission rights-of-way that contains multiple transmission lines and shrub-steppe habitat. Within a mile of the project area, several more densely populated areas occur along the Columbia River; however, no surface waters occur in the vicinity of the project. Project location is below; management is the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR).

Township	Range	Section	Management
28N	30E	2	BOR
29N	30E	34	BOR

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) for the Grand Coulee geotechnical investigations on April 7, 2026. The Washington DAHP concurred with the delineation of the Area of Potential Effects (Log #2026-03-02320-BPA). Following a review of the available data, BPA determined a cultural resources survey would occur ahead of the geotechnical testing. Following the survey, if no sites are found, geotechnical investigation would proceed with an archaeologist present to monitor the testing. Results of the survey and monitoring would then be incorporated into a cultural resources survey and monitoring report. Based on the results report, BPA would make the Determination of Effects and send the determination and the report to the consulting parties.

Note:

- Archaeological Resources Protection Act and Antiquities Act permits from BOR would be obtained prior to cultural resources survey and be on site throughout geotechnical investigations
- An archaeological monitor would be present to monitor the geotechnical investigations. Monitoring results would be included in the project's cultural resources report.
- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, work would be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Anticipated impacts to geology or soils would be minimal at the boring and test pit locations. Excavated soil would be temporarily stored beside the testing areas. After completion, the boring and test pit locations would be immediately backfilled, and the area would be graded to original contours. Disturbed areas would be reseeded as needed with a precipitation appropriate seed mix to minimize erosion.

3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status plant species or habitats occur within the project area. The Grand Coulee substation switchyards are rocky and clear of vegetation. Minimal impact to vegetation would result at sites outside the developed switchyards from general equipment access and testing, and the minor grading and vegetation clearing required to create travel paths to access borings to the northeast and southeast of the 230-kV switchyard. Disturbed areas would be stabilized and reseeded as needed with a precipitation appropriate seed mix to minimize erosion.

4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats occur in the project area. The project would have temporary noise and disturbance impacts to local wildlife species related to testing equipment noise and human presence. Noise generation would be similar to that regularly generated as part of substation operation and impacts would be temporary and suitable habitat occurs adjacent to the project area accessible to wildlife during testing.

5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies occur within the project area; therefore, the project would have no impact to water bodies, floodplains, or fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands do not occur within the project area; therefore, the project would have no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Localized turbidity could result from the project, if the depth of borings reach the underlying groundwater or aquifer. These impacts would be minor and temporary and would not have lasting impacts to groundwater or aquifer quality.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in land use or specially-designated areas as a result of the project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed geotechnical investigations would not change the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicle emissions would occur during project implementation. However, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after the implementation of the proposed project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary noise would occur during daylight hours. No ongoing noise increase is expected for this area as a result of this project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to human health and safety are anticipated to result from this project.

Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.

Explanation: N/A

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: N/A

Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

Explanation: N/A

Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.

Explanation: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: BPA realty maintains ongoing coordination with BOR.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: **LAURA**
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